

## **Sexual Addiction - Are You A Sex Addict - Part 2**

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Sexual addiction is a dysfunctional pattern of compulsive sexual behavior that continues even after the addict knows that it is causing major problems in their life. The sex addicts has a compulsion to engage in the problem behavior despite the fact that it has become emotionally dissatisfying and self-destructive. Compulsion is defined as an "irresistible" urge to engage in a behavior. The sexual acting out produces guilt, shame, and repeated unfulfilled promises to stop.

Addiction creates an experience that is called "powerlessness and unmanageability" in 12 step recovery groups. Compulsivity implies a "powerlessness" over resisting the compulsive urge to do the behavior. "Powerlessness" means the behavior is out of control. The compulsive behavior, along with the addict's attempts to stop and the over-compensation for the destructiveness of the behavior create a life that becomes more and more unmanageable. Despite the addict's attempts to keep the behavior hidden, s/he experiences an escalating sense of shame and guilt, and self-loathing. The addict tries to eliminate the problem behavior, but cannot consistently do so. The losses suffered due to addiction, including the marriage, jobs, financial, arrests, self-esteem and self-efficacy may or may not create an awareness of the need for help. The compulsive behavior persists even after addicts can no longer deny the negative consequences to their lives.

The sexual compulsions of a sex addict could involve the physical, emotional, or obsessive thoughts/fantasy. Varieties of sexual compulsivity are limitless. Examples of compulsive sexual behavior include but are not limited to masturbation, voyeurism, infidelity, internet sex, pornography, cruising and/or anonymous sex, dangerous sex.

Sexual addiction parallels alcohol and other drug (AOD) addictions in that sex is the "drug" that medicates the feelings. The compulsive sexual behavior allows the addict to temporarily escape feelings and problems, to reduce emotional or psychological pain, and/or to control stress - in other words to self-medicate discomfort. Symptoms of sexual addiction are listed below:

- Pre-occupation, or an obsession with sex that overshadows and interferes with other areas of the addict's life.
- Inappropriately large amount of time and energy devoted to planning or fantasizing about sexual activity or recovering from sexual acting out.
- Feelings of shame, guilt, despair, about your sexual behavior or thoughts
- Inability to stop engaging in the behavior despite repeated attempts to do so.
- Persistent compulsive behavior despite awareness of experiencing negative consequences from that behavior.
- Sexual compulsion or obsession is used as the main way you cope with life, feelings, and problems.
- Important social, family, career, or spiritual activities are neglected or given up because of sexual behavior

- Engaging in certain "ritualized" routines that are an important part of the sexual acting out.
- Need for increasing amount or intensity of sexual experience.
- Negative financial consequences because of the acting out.
- Negative relationship consequences because of the acting out.
- Loss of interest in sex with your partner or lack of interest in genuine intimacy with a long term partner
- Spending more time with sexual compulsivity than with intimate partners.
- Keeping secrets about your sexual behavior from significant others.
- Having regrets after acting out sexually.
- Frequenting places like sex clubs, strip clubs, adult book stores, massage parlors, cruising locations.
- Your sexual behavior is dangerous or the circumstances of your acting out could get you arrested.

If you are experiencing some of the above symptoms, you should be screened and/or assessed for sexual addiction. The addictions specialist making the assessment can provide an appropriate referral for treatment. The road to recovery begins with recognizing that you are out of control sexually and beginning to believe that the compulsive behavior can be stopped. To do that, you must take a realistic look at your behavior, the problems caused by that behavior, and becoming aware that your attempts to stop by yourself have not worked. If you see yourself in this description of sexual addiction, seek help now.

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